



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard 5 September 2000

KURANDA RANGE CORRIDOR

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (7.04 p.m.): I endorse the comments made by the member for Mansfield. I went to school with Jai Taurima, and I too wish him luck. It was a class of pretty high achievers, I must say.

Tomorrow morning I will bring to this Parliament a petition which contains around 3,600 signatures. That petition is to build a road from Cairns to the tablelands along the route commonly known as the Lake Morris/Davies Creek route. I hope this petition will be met with some response from the Minister. People in the tablelands, Cairns and the area of Barron River—certainly, a lot of the signatures contained in the petition are from people living in the area around Kuranda—are dubious of Government plans to build a tunnel or to widen the road over the Kuranda Range. These are things that the people in those areas do not want.

Dr Clark interjected.

Mr NELSON: I can guarantee the member that a lot of people who come to me from the Kuranda area—and there are a lot of them—say that they definitely do not want a widening of the Kuranda Range corridor. They want to see an alternative route so that they can maintain their village lifestyle, which is something they are very proud of. However, that is under threat and has been under threat for quite some time under the previous Mareeba Shire Council, which was led by a Labor Party stalwart in north Queensland. I know that the people of Kuranda are not too happy with the current plans. Most of them have come to me to say that they would like to see an alternative route.

The alternative route being proposed is the only sensible route. It is the only route that has the support of most of the thinking people in Kuranda. It is funny that the member for Barron River should say something, because the people who brought the petition to me said that they had received a favourable response from the member for Barron River when they went to see her. They will be quite interested to read her remarks tomorrow morning. I can guarantee the House of that.

The simple fact is that there are two other options. The widening of the Kuranda Range road is not an option because it goes through a World Heritage corridor. If that occurs, I do not think it will meet with a favourable response from conservation groups, and rightly so. We set aside World Heritage areas for special protection. That area is particularly beautiful and I believe it should be left as it is. Also, the tunnel is not an option. One cannot dig a huge tunnel and then not use it. The simple fact is that we would want to move petrol and dangerous goods through the tunnel. It cannot be done. The tunnel is not an option. If nothing else, it would cost far too much.

The only sensible option is to build a new route. This proposed new route is good for a few reasons. Firstly, it will provide a third route which will be scenically beautiful. It will give tourists another drive in the area. Driving around the tablelands, the Cairns region and other northern areas is something that I, a lot of people from the area and many tourists enjoy doing. It will provide a scenic route. Secondly, it will provide a route over which dangerous goods can be moved. Thirdly, it will cut transit time between Cairns and Mareeba markedly.

The growth corridor—I call it COA, and other people have a few different names for it—is a long-term proposition. I am a bit sceptical about it. I think growth should go where growth is. I personally believe that, given the limitations in the Kuranda area, the growth there has gone too far. I think Mareeba would be a sensible choice for further growth. The people of Mareeba agree with that. Given the reduction of primary industries in the area, it could do with a population boost. This road would

certainly provide that. It would also provide a better and quicker access for the southern tablelands. Something forgotten in the Kuranda project is that people in Atherton, Walkamin and areas such as those would like a secondary route to Cairns in times of cyclones. The Kuranda Range options do not provide that alternative at all. All they provide is massive growth for the Kuranda area and linking it as an outer suburb of Cairns— something that the people in Kuranda do not want.

I think that fact has been forgotten. In fact, I do not think it has been forgotten; I think there is a trick being played by the ALP in north Queensland. That trick is to try to say, "Yes, we're going to build this corridor", but then not do it because it costs too much. It is a little trick I am playing with. I might be right or I might be wrong, but I know that the people of north Queensland have made their point of view clear with over 3,600 signatures, which is over 10% of my electorate. A lot of the signatures come from Barron River, Cairns and Mulgrave. The people have spoken.

Tomorrow I will bring the petition to the House. The Minister should respond to it. He should take a serious look at what is being suggested by these people. It is the only sensible alternative. It is time for the Government to start thinking about the people who will be using these facilities instead of thinking about political expediency. The member for Barron River should support it, because it would be about the only option that would guarantee her re-election.

Time expired.
